

**Submission
No 180**

**INQUIRY INTO LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY AND
FUTURE OF THE TIMBER AND FOREST PRODUCTS
INDUSTRY**

Organisation: WIRES
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NSW WILDLIFE
INFORMATION
RESCUE AND
EDUCATION
SERVICE Inc.

The Director
Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

24 May 2021

RE: Submission to Inquiry into the Long-Term Sustainability and Future of the Timber and Forest Products Industry

To the Chair and Committee Members,

NSW Wildlife Information, Rescue and Education Service Inc. (WIRES) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into the long-term sustainability and future of the timber and forest products industry, and its impact on our native wildlife and their habitat.

WIRES is Australia's largest wildlife rescue organisation and was formed in 1985. Thirty-five years later, WIRES has 28 branches, more than 3,500 members and assists hundreds of thousands of community members annually. WIRES mission is to actively rehabilitate and preserve Australian wildlife and inspire others to do the same. WIRES dedicated Wildlife Rescue Office operates 365 days a year, acting as the first point of contact for the community to provide information, education, emergency rescue advice and assistance for sick, injured, and orphaned native animals. We receive over 180,000 calls to our 1300 number annually, including thousands of interstate calls. In the last financial year, WIRES provided rescue advice and assistance for over 100,000 animals. On average, WIRES provides up to 80% of all wildlife rescue and care in NSW and plays an important role in national community wildlife education.

In addition, WIRES trains hundreds of new volunteers in wildlife rescue and care annually. Over 1,800 people registered for introductory training in 2020 alone and we are dedicated to the ongoing recruitment of new volunteers and the continued training of existing volunteers. This growing network of volunteer rescuers and carers is critical for the rescue and rehabilitation of our unique native wildlife.

After the catastrophic bushfires of Summer 2019-2020, where an estimated three billion animals perished or were displaced, we recognise that we are no longer operating under a 'business as usual' approach. In New South Wales alone, approximately 7% (5.37 million hectares) of land was burnt. This included 37% of the national park estate, 42% of state forests and 4% of freehold land¹. With this new reality and so much of our natural bushland lost, it is crucial that we review how native species and their habitats are protected and managed in Australia, particularly as such extreme events are only predicted to increase under climate change over the coming decades.

¹ State of New South Wales and Department of Planning, Industry and Environment. 2020. NSW Fire and the Environment 2019–20 Summary. Environment, Energy and Science Department of Planning, Industry and Environment.



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Environmental Impact of Native Forest Logging in NSW

Globally, Australia is the country with the seventh largest forest area and NSW makes up 15% of Australia's 134 million hectares of forest. Native forests are important homes and habitats for native wildlife. Intact biodiverse ecosystems, such as forests, are particularly efficient and cost-effective as they sequester and store significantly more carbon when compared to tree plantations, agriculture and grazed lands. In addition, these forests are integral to conserving biodiversity and providing a range of other ecosystem services. They are also more resilient, functional and able to adapt to a warming climate. Effects of logging and deforestation include erosion, increasing greenhouse gas emissions, causing habitat loss and loss of plant and animal species.

Endangered birds in NSW including the Glossy Black Cockatoo, and many other unique species such as arboreal mammals like Feather-Tail Gliders and the endangered Yellow-Bellied Glider, utilise tree hollows for nesting and raising young. Hollows in trees can take over 200 years to form and are critical in the breeding cycle of many species including threatened birds and mammals in NSW. Without these hollows, many breeding pairs of birds and mammals are unable to nest or raise young, significantly impacting the future of the species. Deforestation in Tasmania is the primary reason for population declines of the critically endangered Swift Parrot, as they rely on deep nesting hollows in Tasmanian forests for breeding and raising young².

Swift Parrots are one of Australia's most endangered birds. They breed only in the forests of Tasmania in summer before migrating to the Australian mainland in autumn where they seek out mature forests to spend the winter, feeding on abundant blossom and lerp. The forests of New South Wales are critical feeding habitat for these birds. In particular, the Spotted Gum forests of the New South Wales south coast are well-documented as one of the most important mainland foraging areas for Swift Parrots. However, the majority of Swift Parrot foraging sites in NSW occur outside of conservation reserves, including within state forests managed by the Forestry Corporation of NSW and open for logging under the Coastal Integrated Forestry Operations Agreement (CIFOA). Unless decisive action is taken to protect the remaining forest habitat across their range and improve and fund management actions, Swift Parrots could be extinct within the next two decades. Logging significantly alters the environment and the impacts have far-reaching consequences.

A meta-study released in 2021 that reviewed 51 peer-reviewed scientific papers found that logging of native forests makes them much more flammable and elevates the severity of bushfires when they occur, pushing many species closer to ecological collapse. An estimated 3 billion animals perished or were displaced during the bushfires, and the Commonwealth has identified 119 species nationwide that are now a high priority for urgent management intervention³. These species were all significantly impacted by the bushfires, largely through habitat loss. Logging of the remaining habitat, without any thought for the impact of further reducing habitat for wildlife that have already been severely displaced, is completely irresponsible in a time when the impacts of climate change are only increasing. The environmental impact of logging is only growing given the critical importance of unburnt forest as refuges for remaining wildlife after the bushfires.

² Wilderness Society (2019). Swift Parrot [NSW/Tas/VIC]. Accessed 25 May 2021 < <https://www.wilderness.org.au/news-events/swift-parrot-nsw-tas-vic>>.

³ Australian Government. Revised provisional list of animals requiring urgent management intervention. Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment. Released 24 March 2020. <https://www.environment.gov.au/biodiversity/bushfire-recovery/bushfire-impacts/priority-animals>



Sustainability of Native Forest Logging in NSW Following 2019/20 Bushfire Season

Almost two-thirds of NSW's state forest set aside for logging was damaged during the 2019/20 Black Summer bushfires. This consisted of 43,000 hectares (62%) of harvestable native forest⁴. In February this year, the Forestry Corporation NSW (FCNSW) attempted to resume logging on the South Coast of NSW for the first time since the bushfires, against the advice of the Environment Protection Authority (EPA). This represents a cynical approach to ecologically sustainable forest management that is meant to be the guiding philosophy behind the management of State forests in NSW.

Since the Black Summer bushfires, the CIFOA permits logging to continue 'business as usual' in areas that were not burnt, because their conditions for assessing ecological sustainability do not anticipate the potential impacts of bushfires – and therefore cannot properly respond to their impacts. With bushfires predicted to be hotter and more frequent over the coming decades due to climate change, it is unacceptable that CIFOA does not include the impacts of bushfires in their ecological assessments for logging approvals.

For areas that were burned, the fire impacts have meant that the FCNSW has been temporarily unable to conduct harvesting in some areas – but only because it is unable to comply with some of the usual CIFOA conditions, in particular the mitigation of erosion risks⁵. Once these issues have settled – which FCNSW is asserting is now the case – harvesting in burned areas can carry on as usual⁶. By refusing to acknowledge the obvious, huge environmental loss of the bushfires and the increased importance of these remaining areas of forest as the final refuges for displaced wildlife, and instead powering on 'business as usual', is an act of deliberate blindness.

This inquiry has the opportunity to recommend critical actions that can secure a more environmentally sustainable future for the timber industry. In considering the future of the timber industry in NSW, we urge you to consider the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. Immediately suspend all current and planned forestry operations within fire impacted areas.
2. Amend the CIFOA to address the effects of climate change, including increased bush fires and droughts.
3. Conserve remaining intact native forests and facilitate the expansion and connectivity of old growth native forests.
4. Develop a forest industry transition plan with a focus on wood production from sustainable and appropriately placed plantations.

⁴ Department of Regional NSW

⁵ Environmental Defenders Office (2020). Is Logging in NSW After the Fires Ecologically Sustainable? Expert Reports Cast Further Doubt. Accessed 24 May 2021 <<https://www.edo.org.au/2020/10/22/is-logging-in-nsw-after-the-fires-ecologically-sustainable-expert-reports-cast-further-doubt/>>

⁶ NSW EPA (2021). EPA Statement – Update on forestry regulation. Accessed 24 May 2021 <<https://www.epa.nsw.gov.au/news/media-releases/2021/epamedia210216-epa-statement---update-on-forestry-regulation>>



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5. Invest in sustainable tourism infrastructure and opportunities for local communities, tapping into the economic value and services of natural areas in NSW.
6. Explore nature-based solution incentives, such as carbon markets, to finance forest conservation.

Taking into consideration the above information, WIRES hopes this inquiry will result in a more sustainable future for Australian forests. We hope you will take these matters into consideration and plan for longevity of New South Wales native forests, and the wildlife dependent on them.

Yours sincerely,

Leanne Taylor, WIRES CEO